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TAGS: PREL UNSC SU NI
SUBJECT: NIGERIAN FM ON DARFUR, UNSC RACE

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador called on Nigerian Foreign Minister Joy Ogwu October 27. Minister Ogwu briefed the Ambassador on her recent travel to Sudan and the GON's thinking on the way ahead in Darfur, seemed to indicate support for Venezuela in the UNSC race, and talked about her desire to improve facilities, capacity, and morale at the Foreign Ministry. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador told Minister Ogwu that US Special Envoy Andrew Natsios had recently visited Sudan and stressed the USG's continuing concern about the deteriorating situation in Darfur. He asked the Minister for her assessment of the situation and any advice she and the Nigerian government had on the way ahead. Minister Ogwu explained that she was sent to Khartoum as an African Union (AU) special envoy in mid-October. She said that it was a "difficult" trip, during which she and her Senegalese counterpart met with President Bashir and attempted to allay his fears about a UN peacekeeping force in Darfur. Ogwu reported that she thought she had made some progress with Bashir during their meeting, but she is frustrated that he remains intransigent. She believes that Bashir has a "fundamental, perhaps irrational mistrust of the United States" which colors his actions. Ogwu compared Bashir to a "spider in a tangled web" and said that the international community must find a way to "help him find his way out."

¶3. (C) Ogwu expressed some frustration that other African leaders have not spoken out on the situation in Sudan as clearly as Nigeria has. She referred to the statements she and President Obasanajo made in September and October, including Obasanjo's call for a UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur as the AMIS peacekeepers are being "overwhelmed" and "it is not in the interest of the world to see genocide develop in Darfur." Minister Ogwu strongly recommended that the United States use its developing diplomatic relationship with Libya to ask Qaddafi to encourage President Bashir to move in the right direction. Ogwu explained that in her view, only Libya and China may be able to sway the Government of Sudan. She felt that Tripoli was more likely to play a positive role than Beijing.

¶4. (C) Ambassador brought up the race between Venezuela and Guatemala for the Latin American United Nations Security Council seat. Ambassador stressed that a problem with Venezuela's candidacy is that President Chavez has expressed contempt for the UN system and would likely be destructive of that system. He noted that the US has supported candidacy of other countries with whom we don't see eye to eye because

despite our disagreements we thought they would be productive on the security council. Minister Ogwu noted that she "knows how the US feels" and said that she had discussed the race with the Guatemalan Foreign Minister while she was in New York. She advised that the USG should "forget about" Chavez's antics at UNGA, which were "theatrical" with no real anger or meaning behind them. (Note: We read this comment to mean that Nigeria will support Venezuela's candidacy, despite US objections. End note.)

¶15. (U) Ogwu emphasized that she looks forward to strengthening as an institution the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. She lamented the dilapidated building that currently houses the Ministry and explained that she is trying to push for expedited construction of the new facility. (Note: The new MFA building has been under construction for years with little visible progress. End note.) Minister Ogwu explained that the MFA's crowded, shabby facility is "psychologically demoralizing" to its staff and does not present the proper image of Nigeria to visiting diplomats. As an interim measure, Ogwu says that she has started monthly "clean up" days, during which MFA staff are asked to pitch in to improve conditions at the Ministry. She noted that during her nearly 30 years at the Nigerian Institute for International Affairs (NIIA), training of diplomats was part of her brief, and she looks forward to improving the training offered to Nigerian diplomats through the MFA's own academy. Ogwu said that the Ministry is lucky that President Obasanjo is deeply interested in international affairs and is a presence on the world stage. She pointed out that Nigeria is unlikely to have a president again in many years with so high an international reputation, so it is important to "institutionalize" Obasanjo's foreign policy leadership within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and build upon it in future administrations.

¶16. (C) Comment: Minister Ogwu was soft-spoken, extremely cordial, and comfortable discussing a range of policy issues.

She prefers to jump straight into business, rather than opening with small talk or pleasantries. Her breadth of knowledge about international affairs and Nigeria's role on the world stage was abundantly clear. Attempting to reform and reinvigorate Nigeria's Foreign Ministry staff is a large task, but Ogwu is certainly an appropriate woman for the job.

Embassy will continue to build our relationship with the Minister and will investigate whether we may be able to provide support for improved diplomatic training through an International Visitor or other exchange program for senior ministry staff. End Comment.

CAMPBELL